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ABSTRACT

As adult and continuing education have moved closer to the mainstream of the educational system, they have been confronted with the need to assess program impact and benefits for purposes of justification and support. Imel (1976) suggests that the need for formal evaluations is influenced by these factors: age of program, funding, accountability, and administrative decisions. Evaluation in adult and continuing education should not be restricted to measuring only program or client outcomes; measures of program accessibility, continuity, and comprehensiveness are also critical. Coursey (1977) suggests that before embarking on an evaluation program the following questions should be answered: (1) what is the purpose of the evaluation?, (2) for whom is the evaluation being conducted?, (3) what is needed to be known?, (4) how much detailed information is needed?, (5) what are the consequences of the evaluation results?, and (6) when are the evaluation results needed? In the future increased federal funding to adult education will be (as it has been) accompanied with requirements for ongoing program evaluation. Another certainty will be the need for interdisciplinary approaches to program evaluation. Criteria for success of programs will have to be determined from different perspectives of different involved and/or interested people in the community and government. (YLB)

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Concept Paper

The Evaluation of Adult and Continuing Education Programs

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Everyone evaluates education, or teaching, but few agree on how to do it. Conversations in school halls or cafeterias often contain phrases like: "Miss Shoelace is great - absolutely great!" "You really learn a lot in this course." "This stuff helped me on the job." "I don't know why I come here? - I learn nothing!"

Introduction

Most adult educators, administrators, and teachers are aware that they are in the forefront of a major social movement; either they have the job of helping the undereducated adults extend their education or they have the job of providing lifelong learning opportunities as a means of enjoying a fuller more rewarding life. These administrators and teachers, therefore, are interested in improving their adult education programs. But to improve something you need to understand its strengths and weaknesses. This is where education comes in.

Administrators responsible for adult and continuing education programs have been conscious of the need for evaluation for program improvement and accountability. For a long time most evaluation activities in adult education relied on "they vote with their feet" criteria, to justify program continuity, as if to say "we must be doing something right if they keep coming." Other evaluation activities were generated by university based scholars who inquired about adults and how they learn, and incidently offered information about adult

education programs and their impact to the practioners. A third source of evaluation activities in adult education were the various, industry sponsored, worker training programs. The criteria for evaluation in this setting were relatively simple, "did the program make a difference?" - in productivity and profitability.

As resources for educational activities become scarce, educational programs are expected to account for their use of resources as a means of justifying their activities and existence. As adult and continuing education activities have moved from their marginal (Gordon, 1978), often self supporting, position closer to the mainstream of the educational system, they have been confronted with the need to assess impact and benefits of their programs for the purposes of justification and support.

Just about everyone associated with adult and continuing education makes informal judgments about program effectiveness. An adult student who reads at the fourth-grade level judges the program, when she drops out, because it is not helping her get a job. The local school board members judge the program when they approve its annual budget. The factory manager judges the program when she discovers that new workers produce as well as old workers. Each one of these people is making an informal evaluation.

Issues in Program Evaluation

Imel (1976) suggests that the need for formal evaluations in adult and continuing education is influenced by several

factors:

1. Age of the program. As programs mature and the flush of enthusiasm wanes, a stage of appraisal emerges. "During this stage, there is likely to be a demand for careful research studies to test the relative worth of the initial program and established activities as compared to new or proposed programs" (Imel, 1976, p. 5).

2. Funding. Programs which are not self supporting but receive funds from outside sources, such as federal, state governments or foundations, must evaluate their programs in order to justify the receipt of the funds and for continued support.

3. Accountability. Imel (1976, p. 6) further suggests that this factor is related to funding and the same rationale may be applied to it. In addition, legislation which authorized the funds requires that the programs demonstrate that the funds they sought and expanded made a difference.

4. Administrative decisions. Imel's (1976) study of "program evaluation in postsecondary adult and continuing education [indicates that it] is a systematic process of providing information, through both formal and informal methods, which can be used in making decisions within and about the program and its results" (Imel, 1976, pp. 206-207).

Keeping in mind these four factors I see a need to address issues related to evaluation and suggest ways of viewing from the practioners side.

The literature is full of suggestions, definitions and cautions about evaluation. Thorndike and Hagen (1961) claim that evaluation is closely related to measurement. It is in some respects more inclusive because it encompasses informal and intuitive judgments and an aspect of valuing - of saying what is desirable and good. Good measurement techniques provide the solid foundation for sound evaluation.

Scriven defines evaluation as follows:

> The activity consists simply in the gathering and combining of performance data with a weighted set of critical scales to yield either comparative or numerical ratings, and in the justification of (a) the data gathering instrument, (b) the weighting, and (c) the selection of criteria.

In this model the goal of evaluation is always to assess the worth of an educational activity by weighing and combining measures on several criteria into a composite rating system of merit. Thus the purpose of evaluation, as suggested by people like Scriven (1967), is at least two fold, one to improve the program the other to make funding or organizational decisions. Hence the selection and weighing of criteria and instruments vary with their purpose.

Scriven (1967) further suggests that evaluation activities have two important foci, a formative and summaritive. Formative evaluation is a process evaluation. It describes what is happening as people move toward achieving the goals or objectives of the program, the course or class. The formative evaluation looks at what factors or activities contribute the most to the

accomplishment of the goals, which activities or strategies are working out and which are not. Summaritive or product evaluation looks at the impact of the program. It assesses the worth of the intervention, program or class. It requires controlled experimental comparisons because the overall merit of a program is always relative to that of the competition. Formative and summaritive evaluations include intrinsic and pay off evaluation (Scriven, 1967).

Intrinsic evaluation judges the structure of the program namely its design, its assumptions, and the processes it uses to attain its goals. Intrinsic evaluation includes judging the program's goals often based on expert judgments. Pay-off evaluation judges a program by its outcomes such as student achievement, attitude changes, skills acquired. It is not limited to looking at program objectives, but it also looks for unintended outcomes (here the independence of the evaluator is important). Ideally evaluation studies include intrinsic and pay off evaluation.

Scriven's (1967) model is considered a composite model and may be contrasted with an evaluation research model which is guided by the standards of science, with major concerns for reliability, validity, and the ability of the design to permit casual interpretations.

Program evaluation, is a step beyond Scriven's (1967) composite-model and includes many of the elements described above. Yet it is different in several important ways. In

the program evaluation model the scientific aspects are considered relevant but not of primary concern. Suchman (1967), views program evaluation as an integral aspect of program management and planning. Thus program evaluation is an internal activity, not something that is conducted by "objective outsiders." Program evaluation is undertaken to improve ongoing service programs and is secondarily geared to the discovery of new knowledge.

It is important to consider program evaluation as an internal organizational activity that grows developmentally that is, its capacity to measure levels of efforts (what the staff does, inputs) must precede the capacity to measure the level of performance (achievement, quantity, quality or effectiveness of the performance), which precedes the level of adequacy (what you do in relation to need/demand) and the level of efficiency (outputs relative to inputs). There is a basic prerequisite to conducting program evaluation namely the design and implementation of an adequate and accurate management information system (Koocher and Broskowski, 1977).

As I see it evaluation in adult and continuing education should not be restricted to measuring only program or client outcomes, with or without control group comparisons. Measures of program accessibility, continuity and comprehensiveness are also critical. A useful evaluation approach must be able to measure multiple criteria that address more than one perspective, particularly in which there is conflict around

the purposes of education and competition for scarce resources. Thus evaluating a program is more than evaluating the outcomes for the program's clients. The need to go beyond simple pay off evaluation (outcomes) is due to the fact that there are many different perspectives on what constitutes a good program. These perspectives include the goals of teachers, administrators, legislators, funding sources, general public, the student and the student's family.

Evaluation research about programs has its genesis in classical experimental design and methodology as outlined by Suchman (1967) and Campbell and Stanley (1963). But as the need for accountability moved from the research-publisher to the service-administrator a different type of evaluation was required. The table below attempts to clarify the differences between "field research" and program evaluation.

Dimension	Field Research	Program Evaluation
1) Purpose	Establish casual relationships, prove theories.	Resolve administrative questions, accountability.
2) What is assessed	Functional relationships.	Products, effects, resources used.
3) Type of program	Single purpose program and demonstration projects.	Multiple purpose service programs.
4) Design	Experimental design, control groups, ruling out alternative explanations.	Continuous monitoring or outcome, goal attainment or cost effectiveness.
5) Program orientation	Demonstration project with research orientation.	Service orientation.

Dimension	Field Research	Program Evaluation
6) Generality of findings	Not limited in space and time, as long as same type of Ss and design used.	Purpose is to provide data for concrete decisions about specific programs.
7) Utility of data	Contribution to the field of knowledge. Publish it.	Program improvement. Increase efficient, effective performance.

Coursey (1977) suggests that before embarking on an evaluation program the following questions should be answered:

1. What is the purpose of the evaluation? Should the evaluation respond to efficiency issues? If so, the evaluation design should at least be a cost-benefit analysis and "its variants of cost-effectiveness and cost-utility analyses which are really decision making tools whose purpose is to determine which of several interventions maximizes the desired result for the particular resource investment" (Coursey, 1977, p. 53).

Another evaluation task may respond to questions about the adult education staff overall performance on their jobs. The evaluation design will rely on observations of performance in the classroom, collecting data on student's satisfaction with courses, and collecting data on the staff job satisfaction. The performance of the staff is linked to the training which is provided to them. To evaluate this activity information should be collected about the type of staff development activities that are planned and those completed, duration of

the activities, number of staff participating and the types of adult educators who are involved.

Stufflebeam and Guba (1970) define educational evaluation as follows:

> Educational evaluation is the process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives (Guba, 1970, p. 3).
>
> Generally evaluation means the provision of information through formal means, such as criteria, measurement and statistics to supply rational basis for making judgments which are inherent in decision situations. . . . stated simply, evaluation is the science of providing information for decision making (Stufflebeam, 1969, p. 53).

Evaluation procedures which are based on management models and perspective will generally focus on the planning, decision making and implementation aspects of adult education programming.

Models of program planning which include an evaluative component are Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT), Planning, Programming, Budgeting System (PPBS) and Management by Objectives (MBO).

A model of program decision making is the decision-theoretic approach suggested by Guttentag (1973). This approach is keyed to frequent program decisions and to the values of the decision makers as identified by the program staff and is related to the mission of the organization.

2. Who are you conducting the evaluation for? The users of the gained information will determine the design.

An evaluation for administrative purposes will most likely follow the program planning, decision making and cost analysis

discussed above.

If the evaluation is for the board of education or a community advisory board it may include several of the models discussed above but must also include a needs assessment of the community and demonstrate how the program addressed these needs.

The funding agency requires evaluation of the program effectiveness, cost benefits analysis and simple accounting of people served.

The National Advisory Council on Adult Education (1978) reviewed the program and administration effectiveness of the Adult Education Act:

> program effectiveness in terms of the impact of the program on people's lives, using existing statistical data, . . . various existing studies, interviews and observations (NACAE, 1978, p. 45).

Their remarks on evaluation may serve as a guideline for designing evaluations for funding agencies.

First evaluation is defined as a decision-making process essential to planning (ibid, p. 11).

Second they concluded that "in many Federal education programs, evaluation and compliance monitoring have become confused." (ibid, p. 11).

Third that adult education evaluation is "based primarily on headcount data, not on impact of programs on individual human lives." (ibid, p. 11).

The National Adivsory Council on Adult Education suggested that:

a. Evaluation should identify program strengths and weaknesses and address follow-up activities rather than compliance only.

b. Evaluation must be client oriented: Concerned with impact of programs on people's lives.

c. Evaluation must be more than records of compliance or noncompliance with Federal and State laws.

d. Evaluation should include:

- Analysis of cost and benefits
- Analysis of staff performance
- Analysis of organizational structures
- Analysis of programs in terms of impact on clients

e. Evaluation results should be disseminated nationally, but must include description of evaluation process and instrumentation (NACAE, 1978, p. 11).

In general decision-makers in adult education must realize that different groups have different information needs and the evaluation designs must vary accordingly.

3. What do you need to know? The rule here is if you do not need it do not do it. Hereto lies the basic difference between program evaluation and evaluation research. The latter purpose is to make scientific contributions to the field of knowledge, consequently all information is essential and there are no limits to the need to know. On the other hand, program evaluation is related to program operations and program resources and must be limited by the need to know and ought not exceed those needs lest it over tax the program resources.

4. How much detailed information is needed? Think small is the rule here. Response to this question is linked to the previous question.

5. What are the consequences of the evaluation results?

Another way of asking this question is will the program be continued or discontinued on the basis of the evaluation results?

The design, care in implementation of and resources allocated to the evaluation effort will vary significantly if the consequences or pay-off are the life or death of the program. The decision makers must know specifically how the evaluation results will be used.

6. When are the evaluation results needed? Usually the leisurely pursuit of knowledge is precluded in program evaluation, results must be provided within a green time line.

Because program evaluation represents a considerable investment in money, personpower, development and running time, and staff tolerance great care should be used in responding to the questions above.

What does the future hold?

There are a number of changes on the horizon that underscore the increasing importance of ongoing program evaluation activities in both the public and private arenas of adult education. These changes have been stimulated by legislation and consumer action and have been magnified by the practioners responses to these pressures and those of scarce resources.

In addition adult education (ABE/High School Completion), for example,

> is the fastest growing of the four major American public education sectors: elementary, secondary, postsecondary and adult. At the same time, adult basic and secondary education programs serve the most voiceless population in this country: illiterate, functionally incompetent, unable to secure adequate jobs, many on welfare, disenfranchised, often despondent and frequently forgotten (NACAE, 1978, p. 21).

The Federal response to meeting the needs of this population has been an increase in resource allotment, primarily because of the realization that population's literacy and functional competence are essential to the national economic health. The increase in Federal funding is accompanied with requirements for ongoing program evaluation, at a minimum require the accounting of services provided to the underserved and minority populations. A good example of this trend may be found in The Adult Education Act Sections 301 and 302 (P.L. 91-230), which obligate the states to conduct continuing evaluations of the effectiveness of their programs not by reporting the number of students served but also attempt to measure the impact of its programs on people's lives. In addition to measuring the specific impact of a given program on their students (users), the program must be demonstrably accessible, and must address the primary problems and needs within that community (i.e. what will they do about the nonusers?).

If zero-base budgeting comes to federal and state agencies, such evaluation data will be critical to the continued operation

of adult education programs. It will be impossible to write a service, training or research-demonstration grant, that does not spell out quite specifically how and what evaluations are to be done. Explicit specifications of the processes and outcomes to be measured will be required.

Another certainty will be the need for interdisciplinary approaches to program evaluation, including the points of view and skills of managers and accountants, in addition to teachers, students and educational administrators. The reasons for this collaboration has been noted above. By the same token the criteria for success of particular adult and continuing education programs will have to be determined and evaluated from different perspectives of different people in the community who relate to the adult and continuing education program. Community leaders, school personnel, families and staff of allied community agencies all have appropriate input for establishing evaluation criteria. Government funding and other funding agencies have legitimate concerns for costs, accessibility and follow-up services.

The essence of the decision-making process is to provide the proper mix of education services, funds and materials to deliver the optimal quantity and quality of services to the right consumer, at the right place and at the right time (Koocher and Broskowski, 1977).

Finding this proper mix depends on identifying the relative

cost and effects of alternative approaches. It stands to reason that such choices need to be made on the basis of multiple factors and information about relative differences among programs in their level of effort, effectiveness, adequacy and efficiency.

In summary, the trend toward evaluation of adult and continuing education programs will become stronger, as needs increase faster than resources. Adult and continuing education leaders will have to learn more about program education, to improve their services and delivery methods.

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